Ibn Abdul Barr On The Meaning Of Istiwaa

The 'Bukhaari of the west', the Imaam, the haafidh, ibn Abdul Barr (d.423), the Imaam of the Sunnah of his time said in his work at-Tamheed under the commentary of the 8th hadeeth:

"From Abu Hurayra that the Prophet ﷺ said, 'Our Lord descends every night to the lowest heaven when the last third of the night remains and says: "who is there calling upon Me that I may answer? Who is there asking of Me that I may give him?"'

"This hadeeth is established from the point of view of transmission having an authentic isnaad, the Ahlul Hadeeth do not differ as to it's authenticity...

...and in this is an evidence that Allaah is over (fee) the heaven, over (alaa) Throne, above (fawqa) the seven heavens, as is said by the Jama'ah, and this is their proof against the Mu'tazila and the Jahmiyyah in their saying that Allaah is in every place, not over the Throne. And the evidence for what the People of truth say on that is His saying:

- **'The Most Merciful rose over the Throne'(20:5)**
- **'the He rose over the Throne...' (32:4)**
- **'Then He rose over the heaven when it was smoke' (41:11)**
- **'Then they would surely have sought out a way to (ilaa) the Lord of the Throne' (17:42)**
- **'To Him ascend all goodly words...'(35:10)**
- **'So when His Lord appeared to the mountain, He made it to collapse to dust' (7:143)**
- **'Do you feel secure that he who is over (fee) the heaven will not cause the earth to sink on you?' (67:16)**
- **'Glorify the name of your Lord Most High' (87:1)**

And this is from al-Uluww and likewise his saying:

- **'The Most High, the Most Great' (2:255)**
- **'The Most Great, The Most High' (13:9)**
- **'Owner of High ranks, owner of the Throne.' (40:15)**
- **'They fear their Lord from above them' (16:50)**

And the Jahmi says he is lower (then them)

- **'He arranges every affair from the heavens to the earth, then it (affair) will go up to him.' (32:5)**
- **'O Jesus! I will take you and raise you to Myself' (3:55)**
- **'Rather, Allaah raised him to Himself.' (4:158)**
- **'From Allaah, the Lord of the ways of ascent. The Angels and the Spirit ascend to Him.' (70:2-3)**

As for His saying, **'do you feel secure that he who is "fee" the heaven'**, then the meaning is 'who is over ('alaa) the Heaven' i.e. over the Throne. And the word fee is being used with the meaning

'alaa. Do you not see His saying, '**so travel freely fee the land'** (9:2) meaning 'upon ('alaa) the land', and His saying, **'and I will surely crucify you on (fee) the trunks of the palm trees'** (20:71) and all of this (i.e. interpretation of fee) is supported by His saying, 'the angels and the spirit ascend to Him'

And what we have recited and the like of it from the verses to do with this topic are clear in their denial of the saying of the Mu'tazila (i.e. Allaah is everywhere). And as for their taking istawaa metaphorically, and in ta'wil to mean istawlaa (conquering) then this is not a meaning of it because it is not clear (ghayru dhaahir) in the language. And the meaning of istawlaa in the language is conquering/overcoming, and Allaah the Exalted does not (need to) overcome or overwhelm anyone. And He is the One, the Eternal.

And from the right of the Words (of Allaah) is that they be taken upon their literal meanings ('alaa haqeeqatihi), until the ummah is agreed that what is meant is the metaphorical meaning, when there is no way to follow what is revealed to us from our Lord except in that way. And the speech of Allaah is directed towards it's most famous and obvious meanings if that (i.e taking it upon its most famous meanings) is not stopped by something we have to submit to. And if all the claims of metaphors were allowed for every claimant then nothing would be established from the actions of worship. And it befits Allaah that he speaks only with that which the Arab understands according to the constraints of the speech (ie everyday language) from what is the correctly understood by the listener. And istawaa is known in the language and understood to be: Highness (uluww) and rising above something and establishing (at-tamkinu) and settling in it (istiqraar feehee).

Abu Ubaid said about His saying, 'the Most Merciful Istawaa upon the Throne' - 'Above ('alaa)...'

And others said, Istawaa meaning istaqarra (settling) and they seek support in His saying, **'and when he attained his full strength and was perfect (istawaa)'** (28:14) i.e. completed his youth and grew settled and there was not any increase in his youth.

Ibn Abdul Barr said, and istawaa is istiqraar in highness (uluww) [i.e. He has settled in being high], and this is what Allaah informs us, **'In order that you may mount firmly (tastu) on their backs, and then may remember the favours of your Lord when you mount (istawaytum) thereon...**' (43:13), and Allaah said, **'and it rested (wastawat) on Mount Judi'** (11:44), and He the Exalted said, **'so when you embark (istawayta) and those with you on the ship'** (23:28). [i.e. all the examples show itiwaa to mean coming to rest in an elevated position]

....and as for their using as proof the narration of Ibn Abbaas about the saying of Allaah, 'The Most Merciful istawaa upon the Throne' -**'He conquered/overcame (istawlaa) all His opponents and He is everywhere.'**

Then the answer is that this hadeeth is munkar to Ibn Abbaas (RA) and is transmitted by unknown and weak narrators ....(takhreej ommitted).... and they (i.e Mu'tazila who narrated this hadeeth) do not accept the individually narrated tradition so how can they permit depending upon the likes of this hadeeth, if they had sense and were just? As for what they hear Allaah say, **'And Pharoah said, "O Haman! Build me a tower that I may arrive at the ways - the ways of the heavens, and I may look upon the God of Moses but verily I think him to be a liar."'** (40:36-37) then this lends evidence to the fact that Moses (AS) used to say that verily my God is above the Heaven and Pharoah thought he was a liar.

And also from the proofs that Allaah is over the Throne , above the seven heavens is that the Believers in Tawheed (muwahhideen), all of them, arabs and non-arabs, when a matter concerns them, or a difficulty befalls them, they raise their faces to the heaven, and direct their raised hands to the heaven, seeking succour from Allaah, their Lord. And this is common amongst the general masses as well as the elite (khaasa)....And the Prophet said to the slave girl whose master wished to free her if she was a believer, so the Messenger tested her asking her, 'where is Allaah?' So she pointed to the heaven. Then he asked, 'who am I?' So she said, 'you are the Messenger of Allaah'. So he said, 'set her free for she is a believer.' So it sufficed the Messenger of Allaah from her, her raising her face to the heaven and was content with that, not requiring

anything else.

And as for their seeking support in the saying of Allaah, 'their is no secret discourse of three except that he is the fourth' then this is not a proof for them according to the literal sense of this verse. Because the scholars from the companions and taabi'een from whom the explanation of the Qur'aan is taken from, said in explanation of this verse: He is over the Throne, and His Knowledge is in every place, and no one from amongst them, whose saying is depended on, differed on this. **Ad-Dahhaak said about His saying, 'their is no secret discourse of three except that He is the fourth...' - 'He is over His Throne, and His Knowledge is with them, wheresoever they may be.' And it has reached me that Sufyaan ath-Thauri said something similar. Ibn Mas'ud (RA) said, 'Allaah is over the Throne, and nothing is hidden from Him of your actions'"**

(Tahdheeb 7:103-105)